

Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



PURPOSE OF STUDY

The Lowcountry Gullah Special Resource Study (SRS) was mandated by Congress to determine whether or not the National Park Service (NPS) has a role in preserving Gullah/Geechee culture and if so, what that role might be. The primary goals of this Special Resource Study are:

1. to analyze the multi-faceted components of this living culture using the established criteria for the study of areas for potential inclusion in the National Park System and;
2. to make recommendations to the Southeast Regional Director based on those criteria.

NPS has been examining Gullah/Geechee Culture along the entire South Carolina and Georgia coasts, and into the northeast Florida and southern North Carolina coasts. The study area generally extends 30 miles inland from the coast.

Authorization

The study was authorized in the Interior Appropriations Act of 2000, which directed the Park Service to determine the national significance of Gullah/Geechee culture and the suitability and feasibility of adding various Gullah/Geechee sites to the National Park System.

Current Status

The National Park Service has held public and stakeholder meetings to gather feedback on desired outcomes of the study. These meetings have assisted NPS in developing the draft alternatives for managing associated cultural and natural resources and developing interpretive and educational programs. These preliminary alternatives will be presented at community forums in October and November 2002. Feedback from these meetings will be incorporated into the alternatives that woven into the draft special resource study.

Preliminary Alternatives

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------|
| ALTERNATIVE A | Gullah/Geechee Coastal Centers | Page 2 |
| ALTERNATIVE B | Expanding the Gullah-Geechee Story | Page 5 |
| ALTERNATIVE C | Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Area | Page 6 |
| POTENTIAL PARTNERS ALONG THE COAST | | Page 7 |
| WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? | | Page 9 |
| HOW TO CONTACT THE NPS GULLAH/GEECHEE SRS TEAM | | Page 10 |

ALTERNATIVE A: GULLAH/GEECHEE COASTAL CENTERS

The Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study is an unusual undertaking for the National Park Service because it is directed toward a living people and their culture and because the cultural community boundaries cross state lines. Alternative A presents a ground-breaking departure from traditional NPS initiatives in response to this non-traditional Special Resource Study.

Three interpretive centers, located in SC and GA in convenient to the study area, would be established through partnerships with government agencies and other organizations. Ideally, centers would be established and developed through cooperative use of existing public lands, requiring no funding for land acquisition or removal of lands from the Gullah/Geechee communities. Requested funding would thus be directed toward preservation, restoration, construction, and interpretation of Gullah/Geechee history and culture. The National Park Service would seek to recruit well-qualified individuals from the Gullah/Geechee community.

All three centers would present an interpretive overview of the Gullah/Geechee culture, but each site may feature a particular piece of the story, each complementing the others by featuring a different operational and interpretive emphasis. The units combined would, therefore, offer diverse programs and services that provide comprehensive interpretive, educational, and resource preservation experiences relating to the culture. These centers would serve as gateways to sites in local communities by offering descriptive maps of Gullah/Geechee related sites throughout the study area.

The three projected sites mentioned in this alternative are dispersed in strategic locations along the coast where host and neighboring communities could provide support for the centers. These centers would work together to interpret the history and evolving culture of the Gullah/Geechee people from colonial times to the 21st century.

Site 1: Hampton Plantation State Historic Site, South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (SCPRT) paired with Tibwin Plantation, US Forest Service (USFS). Both sites are located just off Hwy 17 near McClellanville in upper Charleston County. An interpretive center, serving both locations, would be constructed at an as yet undetermined site.

Hampton and Tibwin provide many interpretive opportunities relating to early agricultural practices associated with indigo and rice production and processing, production of table crops, and fishing. Additional possibilities for education and interpretation include:

- Heirloom agriculture and early agricultural methods
- Rice cultivation, both upland and tidal
- Traditional fishing, shrimping, crabbing, and oyster gathering
- Cemeteries and burial practices
- Baptismal sites and practices
- Traditional cooking methods
- Water transportation
- Production and interpretation of medicinal herbs
- Production of sweet grass for basket makers
- Music
- Visual arts
- Displays and demonstrations of traditional Gullah crafts Festivals, programs, concerts and other special events

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- Educational programs through collaboration with partner organizations. Topics might include traditional arts and crafts, land tenure, heirs property issues, historic preservation, economic development, grant writing, heritage tourism, agricultural tourism.

Tibwin Plantation, dating from an early 18th century land grant, is one of the oldest agricultural sites on the SC coast and was perhaps home to one of the earliest populations of enslaved Gullah/Geechee people. There is an African American community in the area with close ties to the Tibwin land.

The house at Tibwin, constructed by enslaved African artisans, was damaged by Hurricane Hugo and is in need of restoration. This restoration would be a stabilization of the building and basic renovation, so that the construction methods would be visible. Tibwin is a little-known site because it was in private ownership until after Hurricane Hugo. This property could be used to tell 300 years of agricultural history by allowing interpretation of the earliest upland rice cultivation methods and the transition to sea island cotton and vegetables.

There are several outbuildings on site that could be used as an artisan center for demonstrating and teaching Gullah crafts. The Forest Service is working to locate suitable habitats on the property for production of Sweetgrass.

In addition to remnants of the plantation past, Tibwin's lands feature a rich natural environment including hardwood bottomlands, pine uplands, tidal marshes, freshwater ponds, and wetlands that support marine life, birds, and other wildlife. USFS has established waterfowl refuge areas along the Intracoastal Waterway. Visitation at Tibwin would be restricted to areas of the property not included in this refuge.

Hampton State Historic Site, a 322-acre park located on the South Santee River, was once a major rice plantation. Both upland and tidal rice were grown at Hampton, and in 1850, over 250,000 pounds of rice were grown and processed with the labor of enslaved Africans. African artisans constructed and later renovated the 13-room house. The restoration of the house provides open walls, so that early construction methods may be viewed and interpreted. The park includes miles of nature trails and areas for picnics and family reunions.

Ledgers from Hampton Plantation exist in the Library of Congress. These records show that newly freed slaves stayed at Hampton and were paid for their labors. Descendants of these slaves still live in neighboring communities, and some own property that was once part of Hampton.

Site 2: St. Helena Island, Beaufort Co, SC, Penn Historic District

St. Helena Island is a sub-tropical barrier island well-known for its intact Gullah community. Like most sea islands, St. Helena is struggling with encroachment and land retention issues due to the population explosion on nearby resort islands.

Plans at St. Helena would include NPS restoration of the Butler Building, a classroom building at the Penn Center, as a museum to house Gullah/Geechee interpretive exhibits. Adjacent to this building, NPS would construct a climate-controlled curatorial/archival/research building to conserve, catalog, and store important artifacts and documents relating to the Gullah Culture. Penn Center documents currently stored in North Carolina could be returned and stored in this facility. Persons conducting research on the Gullah/Geechee people would have supervised access to these research materials. These new facilities would be operated and staffed by NPS employees.

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Other facilities at Penn Center, such as Frissell Community House, could be made available for educational programs and performances. NPS, Penn Center, and community organizations could collaborate on academic meetings, workshops, and other educational programs. Such community programs might include traditional arts and crafts, land tenure, heirs property, historic preservation, economic development, grant writing, heritage tourism, agricultural tourism.

Site 3: McIntosh Co, GA

McIntosh Co, GA, is located along the southern Georgia coast very close to both I-95 and Hwy 17 and thus provides an important intercept point for travelers going both north and south along these routes. A new building would be constructed on Georgia Department of Natural Resources property, that could include museum exhibits (both visual and aural), demonstrations of artisan skills and crafts, interpretations of the lumber and fishing industries, agricultural interpretation (sugar, rice, sea island cotton), appropriate space for musical performances, as well as a retail outlet for Gullah crafts, books, visual art. This site would also serve to direct people to Gullah/Geechee sites in the four state area. Additional community consultation would be sought in the design phase of this building.

The McIntosh County center would be the southern anchor point. From this site visitors could be directed to other Gullah/Geechee related sites in the immediate area as well as to those along the entire coast. Gullah/Geechee related sites in the area include:

- Butler Island, Altamaha National Wildlife Refuge
- Harris Neck National Wildlife Preserve
- Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation, Glynn Co, GA
- Hog Hammock Community, Sapelo Island, GA
- Seabrook Village, Midway, GA
- St. Simons Island

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ALTERNATIVE B: EXPANDING THE GULLAH GEECHEE STORY

Existing National Park Service units would collaborate with state and local park sites located in the Gullah/Geechee project area to administer a multi-partnership interpretive and educational program. Cooperative agreements among agencies would identify and delegate administrative, operational, and program functions for each partner. For example, the National Park Service and the State of South Carolina might enter into a cooperative agreement to create partnership between Charles Pinckney National Historic Site and Hampton Plantation State Historic Site to collaborate on the development of interpretive educational programs on Gullah/Geechee culture in the Charleston area.

The primary goal of this alternative would be to increase interpretation of Gullah/Geechee history and culture in all appropriate sites within the study area. These sites might then complement each other by providing varied programs on Gullah/Geechee culture to visitors. NPS units best suited to this alternative are

- Charles Pinckney National Historic Site
- Fort Moultrie
- Fort Pulaski National Monument
- Cumberland Island National Seashore
- Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve

Each of these units has an existing association with the Gullah/Geechee story not currently highlighted by legislation. The expansion of interpretive programs and other management functions to include aspects of the story of Gullah/Geechee history and culture would be viable at these parks. This alternative may require specific enhancement of park legislation for each of the affected units. In developing interpretive programs, park managers would work closely with Gullah/Geechee organizations and individuals in local communities, as well as academic scholars and researchers, to ensure accuracy and appropriate respect for existing cultural practices and traditions.

Numerous opportunities exist within the coastal multi-state study area for partnership endeavors among existing National Park Service, state park sites, as well as county and local parks. The following list includes some appropriate state and county sites in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. This list is by no means inclusive; other appropriate sites are welcome.

South Carolina

- Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site
- Caw Caw Interpretive Center (Charleston County PRC)
- Hampton Plantation State Historic Site

Georgia

- Sapelo Island National Reserve
- Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation State Historic Site
- Butler Island Rice Plantation State Historic Site (Altamaha State WMA)

Florida

- Talbot Island State Park

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ALTERNATIVE C: NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The National Park Service has defined a National Heritage Area (NHA) as a place where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources connect to one another to form a nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity. Under this alternative, a National Heritage Area would be established to help protect coastal resources, including expansive landscapes that tell the story of Gullah/Geechee culture. This multi-state heritage partnership could interpret the entire Gullah/Geechee area.

The NHA alternative would require a series of cooperative agreements among a variety of private, local, state, and federal partners that currently manage resources within the heritage partnership area (see list of potential partners). This concept must emanate as a “grass-roots” proposal. National Park Service involvement would likely be as start-up coordinator, and would include providing initial technical assistance for general planning, resource management, and interpretation.

Overall management of the heritage partnership would eventually be administered by one or more local entities that would guide and oversee the goals and objectives of the heritage area. Although there would be no direct National Park Service ownership or management of resources in the heritage area (except existing national park units) a compact between the Secretary of the Interior and the management entity(s) would specify measures to administer the heritage area. Although start-up funding may be available, a heritage area must become financially self-sufficient within a given time frame.

Additional Highlights and Issues:

- Funds to assist with NHA implementation would be appropriated by Congress
- Would require development of a management plan (subject to the approval of the Secretary) that includes an inventory and assessment of resources, recommendations for resource protection and interpretation, and an implementation plan
- New federal legislation would be required to authorize and provide appropriations for the NHA
- State legislation would be needed to identify the management entity of the NHA
- Establishing appropriate frameworks and procedures for ongoing advice and consultation from Gullah/Geechee communities and people themselves under the different alternatives (as provided for in NPS cultural resource management policies)
- Identify other resources, sites, organizations (in addition to all places identified in Alternatives A and B). This list should include only those sites that are appropriate for public visitation. The sites listed below are only a partial listing.
 - Historic churches throughout the area
 - Rosenwald Schools and other historic schoolhouses
 - Boone Hall Plantation, Mt. Pleasant, SC
 - Brook Green Gardens, Pawley’s Island, SC
 - Farmers’ Alliance Hall, Sapelo Island, GA
 - Highway 17 basketstands near Mt. Pleasant, SC
 - Seabrook Village, Midway, GA

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PARTIAL LISTING OF POTENTIAL PARTNERS

African-American heritage and preservation organizations in all 4 states
 Atlanta Beach Historical Society
 Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston
 Center for Coastal and Environmental Health and Biomolecular Research, NOAA
 City of Charleston Department of Cultural Affairs (Piccolo Spoleto and MOJA Arts Festivals)
 Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC)
 Clemson Extension Service
 Coastal Conservation League
 Coastal Georgia Rural Development Corporation
 County and Municipal Governments in SC, GA, FL, NC
 Departments of education in the four states (SC, GA, FL, NC)
 First African Baptist Church, Savannah, GA
 FL, GA, NC, SC state park systems
 Georgia Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR)
 Gullah Festival of SC, Inc
 Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition
 Historic Charleston Foundation
 Hobcaw Barony
 Individual Gullah/Geechee artisans
 Original Sweetgrass Basket Makers Association
 National Park Service
 National Trust for Historic Preservation
 Penn Center
 Private heritage tourism sites within the study area
 St. James Santee Parish Historical Society
 St. Simons African-American Heritage Coalition
 St. Simons Island Land Trust
 Sea Grant Consortium in SC and GA
 Seewee to Santee Community Development Corporation
 Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS)
 Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve
 South Carolina African American Heritage Commission
 South Carolina Artisan Center
 South Carolina Bar Foundation
 South Carolina Coastal Development Corporation, St. Helena Island, SC
 South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (SCPRT)
 South Carolina National Heritage Corridor
 South Carolina State 1890 Extension Service
 State and local museums and libraries within the Gullah/Geechee study area
 States of NC, SC, GA, FL
 Tourism groups and Chambers of Commerce within the study area
 University of Georgia Extension Service
 US Department of Agriculture Liaison Office
 US Fish and Wildlife Service
 US Forest Service

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Partial Listing of Universities and colleges:

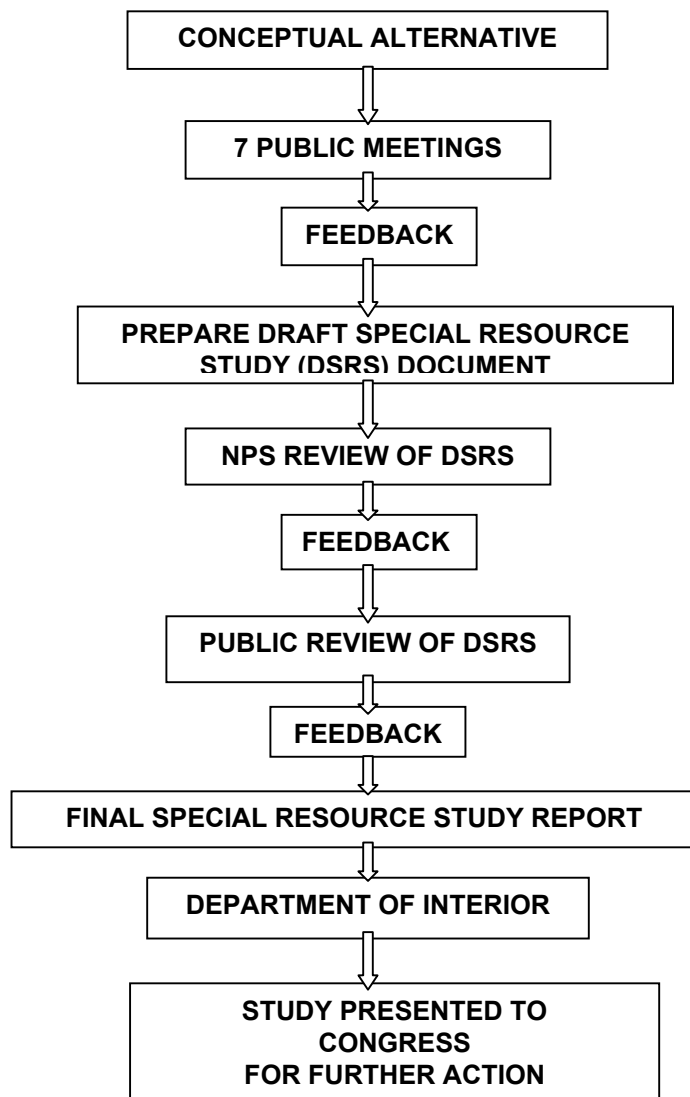
Coastal Carolina University
College of Charleston
Edward Waters College (HBCU)
Florida A & M University (HBCU)
Florida State University
Savannah College of Art Design (SCAD)
Savannah State College (HBCU)
South Carolina State University (HBCU)
The Citadel
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of North Carolina at Wilmington
University of South Carolina
University of South Carolina—Beaufort

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



NPS Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study Team

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Notes